



Dagger with bear head pommel

Not on display

Title/Description: Dagger with bear head pommel

Born: 1800 - 1899

Object Type: Dagger

Materials: Brass, Cedar bark, Iron, Wood, Wool

Measurements: l. 400 x w, 85 x d. 40 mm

Accession Number: 127

Historic Period: 19th century - Early/Mid

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Tlingit, Wrangell

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The pommel of this dagger is carved as a bear, with rounded ears and a protruding tongue which is shaped as the head of a tiny figure. This last feature refers to two themes common in Northwest Coast art, the tongue, which is characteristic of bear carvings and which Jonaitis (1986:135-6) discusses in relation to a shaman's vision quest, and the imagery of devouring, which has sexual connotations.

A dagger closely resembling this one is illustrated by Holm (1983:99), where he identifies the wood as walnut. Walnut, frequently used for pipes and dagger handles, was not local but was obtained from old musket stocks. The brass-mounted blade is also of foreign origin, and both this example and object 126 show how the Tlingit were able to adapt introduced materials to make objects which were in essence 'traditional'. Indeed, part of the nature of the Tlingit dagger seems to have been that it should be made of exotic materials, implying control over wealth and external resources. The cord which binds the handle is of twisted cedar bark.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 271.

Exhibitions

'Empowering Art: Indigenous Creativity and Activism from North America's Northwest Coast',
Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 12/3/23 - 30/7/23

Provenance

Collected by G. T. Emmons at Wrangell after 1882.

Formerly in the Heye Collection, New York, no. 11/5413, acquired in 1922.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1961.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
